

VZCZCXRO9366  
PP RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHRN  
DE RUEHMR #0043 0261053  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 261053Z JAN 07  
FM AMEMBASSY MASERU  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2578  
RUEHC/USAID WASHDC  
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY  
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 2924

UNCLAS MASERU 000043

SIPDIS

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USAID FOR S/GAC; DEPT FOR AF/S

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KHIV](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [AMGT](#) [AFIN](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: PEPFAR LESOTHO PROGRAM PRESENTED TO GOVERNMENT OF LESOTHO  
(GOL)

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Summary  
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¶1. Seven USG representatives made a formal presentation of Lesotho's HIV/AIDS FY07 mini-Country Operational Plan (COP) to high-level officials in the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare (MOHSW) on January 18, 2007. The Ministry's Principal Secretary (PS) chaired the meeting, which was extremely well attended by GOL officials. The meeting was both cordial and frank and allowed the MOHSW to ask questions and voice their opinions on the USG program to date. As non-focus country under the President's Program for Emergency AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and as a country without bilateral USAID or CDC offices yet on the ground, Lesotho's FY07 HIV/AIDS budget is approximately \$8.5 million. The program is in the process of increasing the number of in-country staff (now comprised of a USG HIV/AIDS Coordinator, CDC technical manager and two CDC technical assistants and a program assistant) while the role of regional offices will gradually decrease. The PS was very pleased with the meeting and declared the New Year is off to an auspicious start. End Summary

¶2. Representatives from the State Department (Embassy's Special Projects Program Coordinator), Peace Corps, CDC, and USAID as well as the Lesotho PEPFAR Coordinator made a formal presentation of Lesotho's PEPFAR-funded mini-Country Operational Plan on January 18, 2007. Prior to the formal presentation, USG representatives had held numerous consultative meetings with their GOL counterparts in preparing the document. The mini-COP is a requirement of the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator. However prior approval of the host government is critical to a smooth program.

¶3. The meeting was well attended by all departments and program heads within the MOHSW. The GOL raised a number of questions and issues, including a request for a report on USG expenditures to date, the importance of continuing to scale-up the program to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and the necessity of TB and HIV/AIDS program linkages both from the government and donor side.

¶4. As a 'non-presence, non-focus country' Lesotho's funding has gradually increased from approximately USD 2 million in FY2004 to an anticipated USD 8.5 million in FY2007. The resultant scale-up of technical programs has highlighted the need for in-country staff. In FY2005, the program was run by the USAID and CDC regional offices; with FY2007 funds, an anticipated seven staff will be in-country and the role of the regional programs will dramatically decrease.

¶5. The meeting was the first such formal meeting to present a Country Operational Plan to the GOL and was very well received.

The PS expressed his strong appreciation for the meeting and requested meetings of this nature occur more frequently.

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Comment  
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¶16. Lesotho's journey from minimal USG support in 2004, despite its estimated 30 percent HIV/AIDS infection rate, to a near USD 9 million program has been a demanding one. With the production of the mini-cop and the continued upgrade/increase of staffing, the U.S. is poised to more effectively execute our foreign policy goals and of the President's PEPFAR initiative. Our collaboration and strengthening of the Health Ministry's capacity continues. There remains significant work in the areas of human resources development and outreach to remote villages, some at 17,000 feet in Lesotho's mountainous areas -- representing the majority of the population. The fruitful dialogue we have achieved with the PS has been some time in the making. At this point, we must move forth expeditiously to further implementation. End Comment.

PERRY